

MEL DEYOUNG

Mel DeYoung grew up in a racing environment as his father, Hank, was the proud owner of a modified stock car. The No. 21 1933 Ford coupe, steered by John Cook and sponsored by Hank's Ace Motel, was a constant at Huset's in the track's early years. De Young, clearly bitten by the racing bug, purchased his first race car in 1960 and hired Bob Lukes as the driver. "We didn't do to good the first year because we were always squabbling among ourselves, but the second year we started winning a lot of races," DeYoung said. The DeYoung / Lukes team spent most of the 1962 season in a fierce battle with Hall of Famer Arnie Nimmerfroh. Lukes won four features and finished in the Top 5 six times, but still fell 30 points short of Nimmerfroh for the track championship. But DeYoung and Lukes had a stranglehold at the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds in Sioux Falls, winning the fair event three years in a row. "Everybody thought we were cheating when we ran off from 'em at the fairgrounds," DeYoung said. "We had the engine torn down three years in a row and it always came out the same. The maximum was 300 cubic inches and that 'ol Dodge Slant Six measured out at 290 every year." As DeYoung continued to enjoy moderate success, the expense of maintaining a top notch car was taking a toll. "One night my wife asked how much money I had tied up in the race car and I said 'two' and she thought it was hundred, and I knew it was time to pull the plug," DeYoung said. He left the ranks of car owner and enlisted his services as an official at Huset's. He was the head scorer, worked the back gate, figured points and handicapped the starts. But he really hit it big when he took over the sales and production of a new kind of program. "All Fred (Hall of Famer Fred Buckmiller) ever had was a single piece of paper with the points on one side and one ad on the other," he said. "I think it sold for a quarter and it wasn't even worth that." DeYoung produced a 10-page glossy program that for the first time included photographs of the drivers and racing action. He introduced lucky numbers, coupons, explanations of the flags and short driver bios. The 10-page program quickly grew to 20 pages and became a model for other race tracks. In 1982 DeYoung purchased Interlakes Speedway (now Lake County Speedway) near Madison, South Dakota and took on a new responsibility as promoter. "I thought I knew about running a race track until I got Madison and I discovered I had a whole lot to learn," he said.